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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: ELN RESPONSE TO GOC PEACE OVERTURE EXPECTED
OCTOBER 15 IN HAVANA

REF: BOGOTA 7917 (EXDIS)

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood
Reason: 1.5 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The ELN is expected to give its formal response to the GOC's peace proposal when GOC-ELN peace talks reconvene in Havana October 15-24. The talks are likely to be preceded by a private meeting between Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo and ELN military commander Antonio Garcia. GOC-ELN civil society guarantor Alejo Vargas told us ELN negotiator Francisco Galan said the ELN would find it hard to turn down the GOC proposal, but Vargas cautioned Galan does not speak for the more hard-line ELN Central Command. End summary.

Fourth Round of Talks October 15

¶2. (C) Norwegian MFA representative Johan Vibe told us the GOC and ELN would reconvene in Havana on October 15-24 for the fourth round of peace talks. Prior to that, Restrepo would likely meet with Garcia in Cuba to explain GOC thinking behind its peace proposal (reftel). There was also a strong likelihood of an ELN session in Havana with Colombian civil society groups. Vibe and the guarantors told us the ELN had promised Restrepo a formal response to the GOC's peace proposal before the fourth round started.

ELN Reaction Opaque

¶3. (C) Vibe and guarantors Moritz Akerman and Alejo Vargas told us the ELN's response to the GOC peace proposal was difficult to predict. ELN negotiator Francisco Galan told Vargas the GOC proposal was very positive and would be difficult for the ELN to turn down. However, Vargas said it was not clear that Galan spoke for the ELN's Central Command (COCE). Galan had developed a positive relationship with the guarantors at the Casa de Paz in Medellin but Vargas regarded the COCE as more hard-line than Galan.

¶4. (C) Vargas noted a number of prominent leftist intellectuals with whom he had discussed the GOC proposal had called it a test of the ELN's commitment to peace. Vargas said the GOC's decision to omit reference to ELN disarmament

as a precondition of talks was especially helpful. He explained that disarmament is a neuralgic issue for the ELN since it suggested defeat. While the ELN knew it would be required to disarm under any peace agreement, it wanted to do so in a way that avoided humiliation, he said.

¶5. (C) Vibe told us Restrepo was disappointed with an ELN statement dated September 5, which criticized GOC policy on paramilitary demobilization, characterized the death in custody of an ELN member as an assassination, and questioned the GOC's good faith in peace talks. Akerman had previously told us Restrepo was not overly concerned with the ELN statement, but Vibe reported Restrepo was conveying President Uribe's unhappiness at the tone of the ELN text. For their part, Vibe and the guarantors said the statement likely reflected COCE divisions but also contained positive elements, describing ELN preparations for the fourth round and an ELN interest in a National Convention (which is conceded in the GOC peace proposal).

Norway Optimistic

¶6. (C) Vibe said he was optimistic about the talks because Galan presented him with an ELN financing proposal that suggested that talks would continue for at least another 6 months. The ELN wanted \$500,000 from Norway to cover its "costs" during that period. The costs included travel and other expenses related to the peace process, as well as an undetermined amount the ELN had to pay to Cuba to defray its costs of hosting the talks. Vibe was encouraged the ELN was thinking at least six months down the line. Restrepo had approved the Norwegian contribution and Norway's insistence that the money be audited, but asked Vibe not to reveal this to the ELN until and unless it accepted the GOC proposal. Vibe said he would tell the ELN Norway would only provide the funds if the ELN accepted the proposal.

¶7. (C) In a similar vein, Vargas summarized the content of conversations between Garcia and Galan on the subject of ELN participation in political campaigns. Garcia reportedly told Galan the ELN was unprepared for electoral politics and had to intensify its efforts in this regard.

Leftist Politicians Skeptical

¶8. (C) Polo Democratico Alternativo heavyweights Carlos Gaviria and Antonio Navarro Wolf told us they supported the GOC-ELN process but would not work with the ELN unless it had disarmed. Gaviria was sharply critical of the ELN's financing demands, asking what kind of political group openly asks that it be bribed to stop kidnappings. Navarro questioned the ELN's good faith participation in talks with the GOC and its interest in electoral politics. He said the ELN's electoral prospects are bleak, and it would be unlikely to give up its military struggle for a smattering of local councilors.

ELN, Guarantor Divisions?

¶9. (C) Vargas said the COCE was likely unsure of what to do, with competing factions vying for the upper hand. Vibe and Akerman reported the guarantors were playing a positive role in pressuring the ELN to accept the GOC terms. Vargas said he was trying to help the ELN draft a positive response. In Akerman's view, however, guarantors Vargas and Daniel Garcia-Pena regarded the "process" itself as vital and would press for continued GOC engagement even if the ELN rejected or heavily conditioned the GOC proposal, whereas the other 4 guarantors said the process might not survive an ELN rejection.